

**‘The Recipe for Love’? Continuities and changes in the sexual politics of meat**

## Introduction

The blade plunged gently into the muscle then ran its length in one supple movement. The action was perfectly controlled. The slice curled over limply onto the chopping block. The black meat glistened, revived by the touch of the knife...I saw the knife enter the firm dead flesh, opening it up like a shinning wound. The steel blade slid down the length of that dark shape...They [slices of meat] fell with a flat slap – like a kiss against the wood.

(Rees, 1992: 3)

Here, the young female narrator in the novel *The Butcher* describes the cutting of steak. Working in a butchers shop over her student vacation she watches a butcher at work, and finding the dismemberment of corpses and the cutting of ‘meat’ highly arousing, fantasizes about sex with him. There are numerate examples in this novel, described by critics as “an erotic tour de force”, where women physically resemble meat, are referred to as pieces of meat or as animals, or use meat as a metaphor for their own bodies, desires and experiences. Such strong associations, whilst dramatic, are easily made, for writing such as this draws on a range of cultural tropes which associate sexuality and the bodies of certain non-human animals with particular formations of gender relations.

Carol Adams thesis of the sexual politics of meat will be well known to many readers here. She argued that interlinked, co-constituted narratives around gender, species and sexuality are apparent in everyday texts of popular culture around food and eating. Her best known work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), uses literary theory to understand the gendering and naturing of food as a set of social practices. Adams contends that meat is the most culturally significant food and is male identified. Women eat greater quantities of “second class” foods such as vegetables, grains and pulses, eggs and dairy products (1990: 26). Eggs and dairy are also “feminized foods”, not only because they are associated with female consumption, but because they are by-products of the reproductive systems of female animals (1990: 27). It is the difference of species that enables the production and consumption of meat, and in enabling us to eat meat; animals must be slaughtered and butchered. Adams argued that the live animal is the ‘absent referent’ in the

concept of meat, literally absent by being dead. She also contended that live animals were both materially and discursively invisible in the popular culture of ‘meat’ food.

The theory of the sexual politics of meat has been called into question by some of those engaged with what I would call ‘uncritical posthumanism’. Judith/Jack Halberstam (2008) for example, infers ‘radical’ notions of sexuality and subversions of gender relations in what she calls ‘Pixarvolt’, non-human animation films which themselves exemplify rather odd applications of supposed ‘animal values’. Halberstam (and others, see contributions to Giffney and Hird, 2008) emphasize fluidity and change in relations of gender and sexuality, as exemplified in various forms of popular culture which deploy ‘animal’ tropes. It is from this position that Halberstam has recently accused Adams of oversimplification and overgeneralization in terms of her reading of images and her understanding of contemporary formations of gender relations<sup>1</sup>. Adams’ thesis of the sexual politics of meat has also been seen to apply specifically to certain kinds of U.S. popular culture, and even then, to be reliant on a few selected examples. Whilst I would agree that Adams uses strong examples to illustrate her case (and particularly in her more recent book, *The Pornography of Meat* (2003)), I will defend her broad thesis here. I will also be extending it in two respects. First, I will be arguing that Adams work has applicability beyond the context of U.S. food culture. In substantiating this, I will be using a range of illustrative cases drawn from the more subtle repertoire provided by the cultural texts of meat which predominate in the British context. The illustrations here come not only from advertising, but also from cookery literature and my second development of Adams analysis focuses on the cooking of meat itself. The sexual politics of meat is constituted not only by the gendered and sexualized construction of certain foods for certain consumers, but also in the manner in which it is cooked and prepared.

This paper draws on a range of representations of meat and animal foods including recipes and articles in cookery and women’s magazines, advertisements carried by such publications and also found on television and bill boards, sponsored by individual companies, the British meat industry and supermarket chains<sup>2</sup>. I examine the gendering of certain foods, the gendering of ‘foodwork’ and the sexualisation of animal foods. I will argue that the gendered and eroticized presentation of foods derived from the bodies of farmed animals is normalized in texts of cooking and eating in contemporary Britain. In so doing, I adopt a similarly critical structural approach to that of Adams (1990, 2003), employing discursive analytics in considering the ways food

and eating may be mediated through social relations. In illustrating my argument, I present a number of different examples from advertising, cookery books and articles in ‘food’ magazines and mainstream ‘women’s magazines’. These illustrate themes which are common, normative as found from a sample of such publications from the early 1990s until 2009. The examples selected are illustrations of key themes and across a range of food derived from the bodies of farmed animals.

Adams (2003, 2009), and other feminist writers and activists, have been critical of the ways in which the gendered and sexualized narratives which frame meat advertising have influenced the vegetarian and vegan promotional campaigns of some US based animal rights organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). For Adams, organizations such as PETA have been incorporated into the discursive regime of the sexual politics of meat in the process of resisting the exploitation of animals through the eating of ‘meat’. In this paper, I consider the disruptive potential of the “narrating [of] subordinated food cultures” (Gvion, 2009: 53), such as vegetarianism, and the discourse of welfarism, for the sexual politics of meat. In popular cultural texts, the use of (hetero)sexuality to promote vegetarianism has been far less explicit, but I will suggest that it still makes its presence felt.

The paper proceeds through three areas. First, I consider the ways the sexual politics of meat might be apparent in the manner in which animals bodies are cooked and otherwise prepared, and consumed. Second, I look at the ways animal bodies, fragments of bodies and other foods derived from animal bodies are represented in the contemporary popular culture of food and eating in the UK in ways that articulate relations of gender and sexuality. The final section considers the extent to which the sexual politics of meat is reconfigured and/or reinscribed through contemporary changes in food culture, such as the discourse of welfarism and the expression of minority food cultures which resist some aspects of the consumption of animals as food.

### **Gender, species, cooking and eating**

The connections already made between meat eating and the social constructions of masculinities are fairly well known. In his analysis of cultural taste, Bourdieu argued that in French popular culture, there is the belief that fish, fruit and vegetables will not prove sufficiently ‘filling’ for men who require the energy-giving properties of red meat (Bourdieu, 1984: 190). Bourdieu contends that in meat-eating cultures men believe that eating red meat is inherently more masculine than eating white meats or fish. Like fruit,

fish is “fiddly” food which “male hands” find “difficult”, and fits ill with masculine practices of gulping food whilst women pick and nibble. Bourdieu does not engage with the broader social, political and economic context in which food is produced, prepared and consumed, but the important point he makes is that such cultural differences are means of registering distinction, and through such distinctions, formations of power relations such as those of gender, constitute themselves. Feminists have drawn such insights into a more critically structural approach to food and eating. In British history, there is a similarly gendered food hierarchy in which red meats have been associated with masculinity and white meats, fish and dairy products associated with femininity (Murcott, 1983: 111; Twigg, 1983: 21-2). Charles and Kerr’s (1988: 140) study of food in working class British families in the 1980s revealed a strong belief, amongst both men and women, that men should consume the most meat, and evidence that men were consistently favoured with superior quantities and kinds of meat food. Alternatively, poststructuralists have emphasized the fluidity of food discourses and the variety of responses to an increased range of foodstuffs (Lupton, 1996: 13); yet the diversity of diet is overdrawn in such accounts and power relations of species embodied in the foods we eat, is not acknowledged. Whilst commodity culture appears to diversify and change rapidly, where food is concerned the “discourses of judgment have an enduring structure” and there is a “profound continuity” in food behaviour (Warde, 1997: 42, 165).

It is not only what is eaten and by whom that is of interest in considering the gendering of meat food; the mode of cooking may also be significant. Structural functionalist anthropologists considered that meat orientated cultures prefer roasting as it provides bloody food closer to the rawness of slaughter. Societies with a meat and vegetable diet both roast and boil meat, whereas plant based cultures rarely prepare meat and boil most plant food (Levi-Strauss, 1970: 478-9). Certainly in European history, roasting has been associated with power and privilege and boiling associated with frugality, and in contemporary Western cultures, roasting is celebratory and requires more expensive cuts of meat, whilst stewing is more mundane. For Levi-Strauss, this division between boiling and roasting meat is gendered, with bloodier roasted meat associated with masculinity. Feminist scholarship has to date, however, paid little attention to the mode of cooking in the gendered analysis of meat food.

In contrast, the gendering of ‘foodwork’ has been a focus of attention. Charles and Kerr (1988) found that most men were not keen to cook or shop, and that their

interventions in the kitchen were seen as generally unhelpful by their female partners. The provision of a meal involving meat was also seen by most women and men as being a key part of a woman's role within the household. Murcott found that women rarely bother to cook for themselves but see cooking for their families as important "service work" (1983: 84-5). More recently, Bore and Sobal (2006) have referred to this labour in producing family meals as "foodwork". In their sample of "newly married couples", they found that one partner bore sole responsibility for all foodwork tasks in over half the couples, yet women were no more likely than men to undertake this role. Similarly, a study of childless couples found that female partners decreasingly defer to male choices in food, and see foodwork as a "trade off" against other domestic tasks (Kremmer, 1999). Such findings may reflect changes in the distribution of domestic labour amongst younger cohorts of heterosexual co-habitees, but this does not seem to be borne out by larger scale qualitative studies where data is obtained across social class and age cohorts and suggests that certain forms of domestic labour, such as cooking, remain heavily feminized (Doucet, 2006). Cross-national studies using macro data sets have found that women still perform the bulk of all domestic work, and that cooking, cleaning and childcare are routinely defined as female (Cooke, 2006; Fuwa, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). Kerr, Charles and Murcott's earlier studies pertinently consider the preparation and consumption of food in the context of women's domestic labour and acknowledge that the eating of certain animals by certain groups of people can be seen as an expression of social hierarchy and of social difference. However, these practices are also an expression of the social relations of species. What is not commonly discussed in the literature on food and eating, even in some of these more critical examples cited above, is the way the politics of meat is co-constitutive of gender relations in food preparation and consumption. As we will see below, and in the section which follows, the gendering and sexualization of certain foods, prepared in certain ways, for certain kinds of consumer, is a persistent structure of British food culture.

Gendered notions of food provision and the division of labour in the domestic kitchen have certainly shifted in Britain over the last twenty years. Whilst British television chefs and cooks continue overwhelmingly, to be male, their unseen interlocutors are likely to be female. We have seen a move away from explicit gendering of foodworkers in popular food culture however. A discourse of female competence, contrasted with male awkwardness, was apparent in cookery texts from the early to mid 1990s, whereas in the mid 2000s, such obvious associations between

gendered care and cookery are rarely found. Cookery sections in weekend newspaper supplements, television programmes and food magazines currently extol home cooking, regional cooking and healthy eating. Yet cookery magazines carry the gender of their consumers in their advertising as ever they did with a staple fare of sanitary protection, make up, and perfume in addition to the many advertisements for food and food products.

In the early 1990s, Britain's popular food magazine *BBC Good Food*, ran a weekly feature attempting to educate ignorant men in culinary knowledge, "Male Orders" - for the "wannabe male cook" (March, 1994: 40). None of the men featured were vegetarian, and most chose to cook meat. Occasionally the feature focused on groups of culinary incompetents with titles such as "Men in the Kitchen" (November, 1990: 37). Whilst the purpose of such articles is apparently to encourage men to gain culinary confidence, they tend to reinforce the status quo by emphasizing the difficulties men of all ages have, when it comes to food preparation. This lack of male skill indicates by default, an assumption of female competence, and insinuates that men require an individual woman provider. In addition, the men 'attempting' to cook are patronized by the female 'experts' writing the articles:

Marcus...was wary of trying something tricky without guidance. We suggested salmon in puff pastry as it looks stunning but is easy to make, and is sure to impress his girlfriend.

(May, 1993: 88)

It is also assumed that when men do cook, they bring a specific set of gendered aptitudes and ideas to the task:

'Cooking is just like engineering', claimed retired engineer Doug Cammack, as he beat the choux pastry for his profiteroles from a lumpy nightmare into a smooth paste...security consultant Bob Penrice gripped his swivel vegetable peeler, applying both logic and science to the art of peeling a carrot.

(November, 1990: 37)

Lack of male culinary experience is described as a product of lack of opportunity, absolving men who do not cook from responsibility for their lack of competence, and

implying that responsibility lies at the feet of women as mothers and partners. In the final analysis, female kitchen competence is not surrendered easily, and traditional gender roles are articulated: “they [men] actually looked at ease in the kitchen - it was almost as if they belonged!” (November, 1990: 38). Whilst men apply ‘masculine skills’ in the kitchen however, it is implied that women cook by intuition:

His engineering skills had taught him that flow charts were necessary if he was to get a three-course dinner on the table by a certain time. To us, his charts looked like culinary common-sense - and probably something his wife and countless other women do automatically.  
(November, 1990: 38).

There are instances in which, however, men have long been considered competent: butchering, carving and barbecuing. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams (1990) made the argument that animal slaughter and butchery was linked to the social construction of masculinities with evidence from literary and popular cultural texts. I have also considered the machismo of slaughterhouse culture and material practices (Cudworth, 2008). The gendering of the killing and dismemberment of farmed animals is also reflected in meat advertising through a discourse of male competence in the more aggressive aspects of food preparation. For example, an advert for Tesco beef has the caption: “The art of tenderness. An expert speaks”, and depicts a burly man holding a scabbard across his chest, framed by weighing scales, meat hooks, a saw and a cleaver (*Family Circle*, October, 1994). The violence of the act of butchering is displaced by the contradictory associations of image and text. Whilst the caption suggests that the butcher is expert in ‘tenderness’, the image indicates that butchering is a bloody affair. The butcher creates tenderness in that which he produces. In the accompanying text, the animal is the absent referent: “We’re tough on what we choose. It has to be the right age, weight and shape”. However, whilst the animal is absent, its dead flesh takes on qualities of a living thing: “we chill it down gently, so it’s more relaxed”. Meat is created by male skill and cooking facilitated and even de-skilled by butchering: “There may be nothing faster or easier to cook than a steak but a really succulent one takes old fashioned time and effort to prepare...We need sharp knives. You won’t”.

An exception to this gendered discourse of male skill in butchery and female service in cooking, involves the preparation of ‘seafood’. Here, we find women in a



relatively rare position - that of slaughterer and butcher. The *Good Food* magazine periodically pictures (female) hands pulling apart crabs and lobsters (for example, October, 1990: 1-4), and provides dismemberment instructions (August 1994:80). The recipes requiring the killing of crustacea have a marked tendency to form part of menus regarded as somehow special due to the imputation of aphrodisiac properties to the flesh of such animals (for example, 'Hot buttered lobster with garlic, basil and ginger'. *Sainsbury's Magazine*, December, 2002, no.116: 88). Whilst the killing of most animals is associated with men and machismo, hidden from public view in abattoirs, the killing of molluscs and crustaceans may be undertaken by women in domestic spaces.

There is a tendency for recipes involving boiling meat to be infused with narratives around familial care and nourishment, whereas those with roast or grilled meat are more closely associated with masculinity and are more likely to be sexualized. Many 'traditional' British recipes reflect their origins as peasant cookery designed to tenderize poor meat and are often described as 'comfort food' presumed to be cooked by a woman catering for the needs of a family:

Braises and stews are the quintessence of good home cooking. They are the hot pots...casseroles, pot roasts, ragouts and jugged game of our grandmother's kitchens.

(*Sunday Times*..., 1993: 67)

This "feel-good food" (Smith 1994: 14) is made from hard working parts of animals: the forequarters of pigs, sheep and cattle and the muscles from the neck, shoulder and front legs. Slow cooking, or mincing breaks down connective tissue that builds up in a mature animal (*Sunday Times*...,1993: 67). The source of those cuts, animals' bodies, is omitted from such narrative. Animals are potential meat; their bodies fragmented into recipe ingredients, for example "a marbling of fat between the meat fibres seems happily to be tailor made for slow cooking" (Smith, 1994: 14).

Such food is supposed to provide compensation for the harshness of daily life, often defined in terms of the climate, when: "the best escape from a cold grey day is to produce wonderful aromas and flavours in the soothing warmth of your kitchen" (*Sainsbury's*..., November 1993: 150). Problematically, kitchens are often far from warm and soothing, and cooking may be perceived as undesirable work. Narratives in these texts form part of a gendered discourse of foodwork, often forming part of

elaborate dinner menus. For example, “straightforward” coq au vin (*Good Food*, April, 1994: 110), involves dismemberment of a chicken, followed by an hour at a stove, and takes an hour and a half to cook, wherein it must be attended. Smith’s “effortless” braised lamb strains credulity even further (*Sainsbury’s*..., October 1994: 80). This dish forms part of a menu involving preparation forty eight hours in advance, two and a half hours work the day before, and five hours on the day of the dinner. Articles such as these provide ‘timed and tested’ menus so the final result appears effortless. This certainly confirms cooking as a form of foodwork, but that work remains gendered. Delia Smith’s menus for example, include timeslots for bathing (in bubbles) and putting on makeup, in addition to clearing the evidence of one’s labour from the kitchen.

Feminist analysis of food preparation can be found in analyses of the ways in which forms of domestic labour, such as cooking, remain feminized despite changes in other aspects of the gendered division of household work in the last twenty years (Doucet, 2006; Cooke, 2006; Sullivan, 2000). Whilst the gendering of the foodworker was very apparent in the cultural texts of meat from almost two decades ago, it has become more subtle. Cookery magazines are not gender specific in terms of explicit gender referents in their specific articles and recipes. However, such magazines retain a more subtle form of gendering in the adverts they carry for non-food products. Demonstrating less change has been the gendering and sexualization of the (animal) foods we eat, to which we will now turn.

### **The gendering of animals-as-food and the pornography of meat**

This section deploys Adams’ approach to the gendering and sexualization of animal bodies as food, with references to some of the cultural texts of British food. Adams (1990) argued that the power relations of species structure the food we eat. It is the difference of species that enables the production and consumption of meat, and in enabling us to eat meat; animals must be slaughtered and butchered. The live animal is the ‘absent referent’ in the concept of meat. Farmed animals are both literally absent – because they are dead, and representationally absent - live animals are invisible in the popular culture of ‘meat’ food. Further, Adams suggested that the representation of animals as ‘meat’ is gendered and sexualized. As a cultural object, ‘meat’ is male identified, whilst lower status foods such as vegetables, grains and pulses, eggs and dairy products are associated with female consumers. Eggs and dairy are also “feminized foods” because they are by-products of the reproductive

systems of female animals (1990: 27). This section of the paper considers how well these arguments translate in the contemporary UK context.

First, it could be argued that Adams notion of the absent referent might be compromised by the increased visibility of farmed animals on British television in particular, and the links made between animals and food – best exemplified on television programmes with such unambiguous titles as “Kill it, cook it, eat it”. Current developments in popular gastronomy suggest that whether or not actual animals are linked to the cooking and eating of their flesh, this is little disruptive of the politics of meat:

...the animal “absent referent” has recently been integrated into the act of meat-eating in mainstream gastronomic discourses, resulting not in vegetarianism but in a certain kind of pious carnivorosity. Celebrity chefs slaughter animals in front of live studio audiences and proceed to prepare meals with the bodies.

(Parry, 2009: 2)

In these new elements of celebrated carnivorism, killing ‘food’ is naturalized. This regime of representation is also strongly gendered as slaughter is framed by a rite-of-passage discourse in which emotional responses to and concerns for animals are derided as ‘sentimentality’ and chefs maintain their masculinity by overcoming this in slaughter. It may be then, that the gendered constitution of meat culture is actually more significant than Adams thought. In this new development in the popular culture of food the witnessing of animal killing is framed in gendered ways which resist (and effectively so it would seem) compassion for animals. It may be that despite the actual presence of a living animal, the animal remains essentially invisible. Farmed animals are not ‘seen’ because they are discursively constituted as always already meat, as ‘becoming-meat’ (Cudworth, 2008).

Another contemporary development also brings the absent referent back in to the representation of meat. From the early 1990s, we have seen the increasingly common promotion of meat food through the deployment of welfarist discourses that appear to be ‘animal-centred’. As Matthew Cole points out however, popular discourses around ‘happy meat’ operate within a speciesist frame and prioritize human gustatory pleasure over animal welfare considerations, ultimately “attempting

to remoralise the exploitation of farmed animals” and on occasion, using gendered notions of virility in promoting a more ‘natural’ product (Cole, 2009: 2-3, 17).

The term “food pornography” was used by Rosalind Coward to describe a “regime of pleasurable images” which placed food as a contradictory sensual pleasure for women - simultaneously indulged and forbidden (1984: 102-103). Food media has become ever more shaped by pornographic conventions over the last thirty years, and constitutes a spectacle to secure a base of consumers “whose appetites are literally and figuratively kept wanting” (Hansen, 2008: 49). Others consider that there are politically significant challenges to this regime of pleasure around food. For example, British television cook and writer Nigella Lawson can be seen to negotiate an identity for a woman that questions the traditional understanding of the housewife and is based on the pleasures of cooking and eating for the cook (Hollows, 2003). Perhaps more significant however, in examining food as pornography, is the way in which non-human animal bodies continue to be presented in a manner which recalls the mainstream pornographic presentation of female bodies. *The Pornography of Meat*, focuses on the extent to which animal flesh is represented in pornographically themed advertising and contends that “[the] Pleasurable consumption of consumable beings is the dominant perspective of our culture” (Adams, 2003: 13). She selects some strong examples from U.S. food culture in making her case that the fragmented bodies and body parts of non-human animals consumed as meat are gendered and sexualized, and looks in detail at the fetishisation of feet, buttocks and genitalia. She argues that this is ‘anthropornography’, “the depiction of non-human animals as whores” (2003: 109), suggesting that the positioning of non-humans as sexual/sexualized objects legitimates domination and exploitation of women and animals.

Over the last twenty years, British meat advertising has displayed a tendency to target male consumers through two forms of gendered discourse. First, there is a traditional discourse of heterosexual masculinity that associates the former with the receipt of female domestic service within the home. Meat is symbolized as something a woman buys and cooks for her family, primarily her male partner. A second discourse is machismo, in which masculinity is associated with virility, physical strength and potency, and advertisements deploying such narratives tend to target young single men as meat consumers.

An illustrative example is the advertising campaign of the British Meat and Livestock Commission in the early 1990’s, the slogan of which was “Meat to Live”. In

each advert of the campaign, a “Meat to Live” caption is superimposed on photographs of young white men engaged in physical activity: pushing each other into swimming pools, playing football or volleyball on the beach, performing cartwheels and jogging. The ‘M’ of ‘meat’ is separated out, encouraging a double take. First we might see “eat to live”, then “M eat to live” with the accompanying text contending that meat constitutes one of the “right foods” in a healthy diet. The image of an active young man epitomizing healthfulness confirms the message of the text - if men eat meat, they will have “vitality for life”, for example:

...you don’t have to go to any great lengths to rediscover your youthful energy. You just need to drop into your local butchers or supermarket meat department. (*Good Food*, December, 1990: 65).

This is a story linked to some very old tales indeed - mythologies of masculine strength and virility deriving from animal blood. Men are seen to possess specific and valued qualities from which women, by their absence from such images, are excluded.

Gendered discourses of food and eating also involve the feminization of certain animal food. Milk, cheese and eggs, produced by reproductive manipulation of female animals, tend to be constituted as appropriate for consumption by women, as Adams (1990) suggests. Cream and cream cheeses are sometimes also food pornography for women. In the early 1980s British women were encouraged to consume cream in cakes that were, according to the advertising campaign, “Naughty but Nice”. There are similar adverts at the time of writing, linking female consumption with dairy products such as ‘Philadelphia’ cream cheese and ‘Galaxy’ milk chocolate. Chicken’s meat is often presented as suited to female consumption, certainly when in boiled, bloodless form. Recipes for roasting the bodies of whole birds tend to focus on the family or entertaining whilst those targeted at specifically female consumption usually involve boiled parts of birds in casseroles, stews and particularly soups (*Good Housekeeping*, March, 1994: 171).

The sexualization of products in British food culture is a distinctly gendered affair. Food for both female and male consumption may be sexualized, and certain foods are constructed as sexually appealing to look at, or are presented in a sexualized context. Whilst more subtly framed than the U.S. examples cited in Adams work, animal flesh is sometimes depicted in a sense that can be read as pornographic - certain

images may recall (hetero)sexual pornography in which women's bodies are displayed for male viewers. For example, celebrity cook Delia Smith's *Guide to Meat Cookery* contains close up shots of various cuts of raw meat from the bodies of different animals, accompanied by a descriptive comment ("carves like a dream", "now has all the awkward bones taken out"). The meat is photographed to look moist, and is arranged 'decoratively' (1994: 20-9). Such images are of attractive 'pieces', objectified fragments of an animal whose experiences in the processes of meat production are thereby erased. In an advertisement for supermarket brand beef, the meat itself can be read as a feminized object. In British slang, vaginal lips may be described as 'beef curtains' - slices of meat. This animal flesh recalls such narratives, and is sexualized by the accompanying text:

...the juiciest bits are in the Sunday roast, not the Sunday papers. If you want something really juicy this Sunday...You'll find that our Traditional Beef is deliciously succulent and tender.... But then, Sunday has always been a day for getting the knives out.

(*Good Housekeeping* March, 1994: 41-2)

The gender of the consumer is established by references to certain tabloid newspapers which target heterosexual men with sexual stimulation via soft-core pornographic photographs, and 'titillating' stories. It is insinuated that men may also gain sexual stimulation from eating roasted flesh as a more satisfying alternative. The image draws on a mythology of masculine virility in which male potency and the eating of red meat is linked, and domestic violence is implied by the comment about the knives.

Recipe books assert that meat for roasting and grilling should be from young animals or from muscles that do little work. The rules of grilling and roasting are to ensure 'juices' are preserved in order to capture the "real taste" of the flesh (*Sainsbury's Magazine...*, June, 1993: 86). There are gendered, natured and sexualized discourses which may be read in the representation of such meat. For example, a recipe for grilled lamb cutlets, captioned "Sweet Young Things", describes the meat as "sweetly pink within, and trimmed with a thin, crisp frill of burstingly juicy fat" (*Sainsbury's...* August, 1994: 96-7). The presentation carries a pornographic story in which the flesh of young animals actively presents itself for the sensual pleasure of the

consumer, this is a relatively subliminal form of what Adams calls “anthropornography” (2003: 109).

It is popular to eat birds who have been roasted whole, and images are abundant in the British food literature. Numerous photographs feature decoratively arranged carcasses or collections of legs. Indeed, chickens intended to be sold as whole carcasses are bred to “keep their shape” (*Good Food*, September, 1999: 22), and to have overdeveloped breasts. The bodies of larger animals are rarely roasted whole, but butchered into ‘cuts’ or ‘joints’. The most expensive is the fillet, part of the pelvic region, followed by the thigh and rump. On birds the most expensive cut is the breast. This fragmentation of animals and the valuation of their body parts can be read as a sexualized and gendered process. The narratives of human flesh in heterosexual ‘soft’ core pornographic stills photography involve fetishism of legs, bottom and breasts and women are sometimes referred to in such narratives as ‘pieces’ of flesh or meat. Animals’ bodies are divided and ranked in ways that arguably reflect the symbolic fragmentation of the pornographic body, and the fetishization of certain elements of it. There are various ways in which the carcasses of whole bodies or body parts of animals are photographed to look appealing and may be feminized either by the photography, the caption, or a combination of both. In an advertisement for ‘Bisto’ gravy products, a recipe for roasted chickens legs is accompanied by a picture of an arrangement of ‘drum sticks’ and the caption: “It wasn’t the first time Mrs. Davies had been complimented on her legs”. Chef Marco Pierre White appeals to female foodworkers with one of the “ways I spice up my cooking”. Using ‘Knorr’ stock cubes as a seasoning for chicken skin before roasting can, according to this advert, “Enhance your breasts, your chops, your cutlets and your ribs” (*The Independent Magazine*, 28.3.09). In these examples, we see a range of interlinked processes - the gendering and sexualization of both foodwork and of the body parts of animals. Such presentation has been a continuous element of the representational regimes of popular British gastronomy throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Men can also be presented as meat, but here, and as Adams has suggested, the regime of representation differs. First, men epitomize health, vitality and power (albeit of the body and not of the mind!), as in the representation of highly muscled men as ‘beefcake’, confirming their status and their masculinity. Second, when men are reduced to a ‘piece’ of meat, it is one piece only, the penis (Adams, 2003: 131). A series of British advertisements for ‘Quality Standard’ English meat ran from 2004-9, funded by

the English Beef and Lamb Executive. The series centered on the character ‘Beefy’ - a cartoon depiction of Ian Botham, a well-known and successful, retired English cricketer and his housemate ‘Lamby’ (Allan Lamb, who also played for the England cricket team in the 1980s). Rather bizarrely (given the ‘macho’ style of their former cricketing play) Beefy and Lamby cook meals of roast beef and roast lamb in ‘their’ convivial kitchen where homoerotic asides abound. At the close of the series however, Beefy is alone in magazine advertisements, seen, for example, lying on a ‘zebra skin’ rug by an open fire, holding over his crotch, a platter with a rolled joint of roast beef, which, we are told “is impossible to resist”.

Whilst the British Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) campaign in the early 1990s, based on the “Meat to Live” theme, targeted young men and deployed discourses of masculine virility, the “Recipe for Love” campaign of the mid to late 1990s, focused directly on the sexualized context of meat consumption, and targeted both sexes as potential consumers. A series of television adverts promoted meat by deploying gendered discourses that implied that heterosexual relationships might be enhanced by meat consumption. These advertisements portray couples whose relationships are cemented by eating meat. The first in the series depicted an elder woman cooking steak for her husband, on their anniversary. Gratified, the husband puts a slow record on the record player, to which the couple dances, cue the caption: “Meat: the recipe for love”. A second advert involved a sketch with three young (twenty-something) women working out in the gym, then eating pork chops, whilst discussing that consuming this low fat food means they will have no trouble ‘finding a man’. The final few adverts depicted a series of dinner parties designed to partner inconveniently single friends. In each case, a joint is brought to the table and carved - the singles bite the meat as they look into each other’s eyes. The context for such narratives lies in the research conducted by the MLC in mid 1990s Britain, which found young single women are most likely to be vegetarian. The MLC considered this abstinence from meat eating to be temporary and re-established when women ‘settle down’ with a male partner. These MLC adverts deploy sexualized narratives of femininity in which women are expected to desire and seek a male partner, and feeding men meat, or eating it with them may enhance a man’s desire and perhaps cement a relationship.

There are associations in British food culture between women’s sexuality, fishes and ‘sea-food’ which is presented in recipes and on menus, as food with the greatest aphrodisiac properties. Whilst British food culture does not abound with the seductive



cartoon lobsters and prawns that Adams finds in the US, many recipes, accompanied by straightforward photographs of plates of food from animals, may still sexualize the bodies of such animals and the contexts of their consumption. For example, a prawn and coconut 'curry' is captioned "Prawn Star". Any other 'star' would render this caption nonsensical, because the absent referent here is the 'porn star'. In addition, the prawn and coconut curry is "something spicy for two" – with the sexualization of the prawns presented as a means to enhance heterosex.

I have suggested here that food advertisements and recipes are targeted to particular kinds of consumer, and a key aspect of food gendering is the (hetero)sexualization of food items, in terms of their inherent qualities and affect. Food from non-human animals is presented to us as an object of desire, and the exploitative treatment of 'food animals' is absent from its public presentation. The examples drawn upon here offer more subtle constructions of the kinds of processes of the gendering and sexualizing of food of which Adams speaks. They also suggest that methods of cooking themselves are an important element in the constitution of the discursive regimes of meat food because the narration of gender and (hetero)sexualization differs with respect to whether the flesh to be eaten is fried or roasted, boiled or spiced.

### **Sexy figs and happy pigs - changing texts?**

This final section explores the possibility of change in dominant food mores. In an examination of vegetarian cookbooks, Smith (2008) has suggested that the discourses of vegetable food also have become increasingly concerned with enabling sensual experience. This, I will suggest is a normalizing aesthetic in which vegetarian food becomes articulated into the dominant culture of food pornography.<sup>3</sup> For Adams however, the sexualization of vegetable foods is heavily masculinised and male identified and as such, cannot contest the dominant food culture in which the "category of species is gendered" and women are represented as meat (2003: 38, 168). Here, we consider the extent to which the interpolated narratives of gender, nature and sexuality that are evidenced in the cultural texts of food and eating in Britain, are reconfigured by some contemporary developments such as vegetarian food sub-culture, and the attempts to promote meat produced according to certain standards of animal welfare.

In early 1994, the publishers of *BBC Good Food* magazine launched a sister publication, *Vegetarian Good Food*. The publication ran for eight years, at which point

its abandonment was explained by the publishers as a mainstreaming process, with vegetarian cookery included in *Good Food*. The majority of recipes used animal products such as free-range eggs, vegetarian cheeses, milk, cream, and butter, and as such, the presence of the politics of species dominion still made its presence felt. In *Vegetarian Good Food* however vegetables were not regarded as an accompaniment to a meal, but as its substance. By contrast, the mainstream food literature presents an all-vegetable menu as exceptional. For example, “unrepentant carnivore” Smith, acknowledges that the preparation of a vegetarian meal is “difficult” (*Sainsbury's...*, September 1993: 69-73), and according to Dimbleby, “vegetarian friends can pose a problem” (*Sainsbury's...*, September, 1994: 76).

In contrast to the use of pornographic tropes in the PETA ‘Veggie Love’ campaign, the sexualization of vegetable food in these cookery texts was subtle in terms of their supposed effect on the consumer. Thus *Vegetarian Good Food* produces recipes for meat free ‘Valentines Day’ meals, claiming: “Onions...are an aphrodisiac vegetable and so make an ideal romantic starter” (February, 1995: 44). Many non-animal foods are sexualized in this way: “From asparagus to avocados, and apples to figs” (February, 1996: 69). There is a difference however between mainstream and vegetarian forms of sexualization. Vegetable foods are aphrodisiac no matter who consumes them, whereas meat food is likely to be associated with male sexual potency.

This publication was more reflective of diverse household arrangements than the mainstream literature. There were, for example, supplements on “Cooking for One”, encouraging the reader to “Enjoy the single life with great recipes” whether they “live alone, are making the most of a night in alone, or are the lone veggie in a household of meat eaters” (March, 1995: 3). Such recipes emphasize speed and convenience of preparation whilst also encouraging the reader to consume “healthy and delicious” food to “pamper” themselves (May, 1995: 16). The target market can be seen from advertisements the publication carried (which were overwhelmingly for female ‘beauty’ products in addition to food), and the subject matter of some articles. Features on women’s health were common, and in articles on ‘treating yourself’, the focus is female, with facials, manicures, and hair care (for example, December, 1994; February, 1995; May, 1995). The targeting of the publication towards women may simply be that women are still presumed to undertake most cooking, or reflect the greater numbers of female vegetarians, but an important difference between this and mainstream British

food publications was that women were encouraged to cook interesting vegetable food for their own gratification.

Public concern about food produced by modern intensive methods has increased markedly, and one response by food companies and supermarkets has been to deploy animal welfarist narratives in the presentation of meat. Such concern is one of the motivations behind the current “emotional turn” (Cole 2009: 10) in public animal welfare discourse. This was the basis of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) ‘Freedom Food’ campaign (launched in April 1993) which approves meat from producers who guarantee provision of ‘basic freedoms’ for farmed animals. The campaign involved major supermarkets who consequently advertised their approved meat in terms of both taste and animal welfare: “farming was so intensive that pigs were leading an utterly miserable life, the meat had no flavour” (*Good Food*, March, 1993), “You can pig out with a clear conscience on the free-range, oak-smoked sweetcure bacon” (*Good Food*, April, 1994). Tesco’s ‘Nature’s Choice’ brand pork based its initial advertising largely on the lifestyle of the pigs: “we insist that pigs live like pigs” (*Good Food*, January, 1993). All these adverts featured photographs of pigs living outdoors. The current advertising used by a small British company, Easterbrook Farms to promote their quickly cooking ‘Speedy Sausages’ presents free range, GM free meat as “from British happy pigs”. The adverts feature cartoon pigs on motorbikes “who live life on the wild side”, with the label “Suitable for Carnivores”. Welfarism brings animals back into the presentation of meat, but does not rid us of the power relations of species, albeit that the pigs reconstructed into these sausages probably live better short lives than do the vast majority of pigs in intensive farming systems.

Welfare and sex can occasionally be seen together in meat promotion and a campaign by the British-based chain store Marks and Spencer in 2008 used very direct meat pornography to raise sales of the most lucrative part of its business - food. The first highly successful television advert in a series features an ‘appetizing’ roasted hen. The smooth voice over, by the actress Dervla Kirwan is both sultry and assuring: “This is not just a chicken. This is a naturally reared, farm assured, extra succulent Oakham White chicken”. The ‘Oakham’ is not a breed of chicken as one might expect, but a brand. RSPCA approval or claims for ‘natural’ rearing mean very little however, even in terms of a fairly limited conception of farmed animal welfare. These ‘broiler’ chickens live for thirty eight days, rather than the standard thirty five in the UK, have

only slightly lower stocking densities in the sheds, and the presence of a few straw bales constitutes “natural behaviour enhancers” (Russell, 2007).

Welfarist narratives are problematic in that they may raise questions about apparently ‘excessive’ cruelties in animal farming and animal food production, whilst suggesting amelioration by welfare reform. However, ‘welfare’ standards often imply little change in the conditions of life of these birds farmed for meat. Welfarism is located within a wider discourse that presents meat eating as benign. Animal farming involves manipulation of animals’ fertility, artificial shortening of their lives, and, for the overwhelming majority, the experience of the slaughterhouse. The assumption that the key ‘function’ certain species of animal fulfill is to become human food is inevitably a reflection of human-centrism and human domination. The increased consumption of ‘organic’ and ‘free-range’ meat, and the presence of welfarism in some narratives of meat is but marginally disruptive to the cultural and economic formations of human-animal relations, or the gendering of meat food. The vegetarian cultural texts examined here suggest elements of contestation in terms of a more pluralist understanding of household composition. However, the gendering of advertising for non-food products is consistent with the mainstream food literature, albeit that the sexualization of non-meat foods was relatively rare. This indicates that the pornography of food is largely dependent on what Adams (2003) calls ‘anthropornography’, and the ways in which the sexualisation of species and the sexualisation of gender are intersected discourses, reflecting co-constituted relations of species and gender.

## **Conclusion**

I have suggested that the model developed by Adams (1990) continues to be applicable, and is so beyond the specificities of US culture. Animals are Others in the cultural texts of meat, being killed and reduced to the status of food, and/or being reproductively exploited in producing eggs and ‘dairy’. These natured goods are presented through gendered narratives that constitute different food products as appropriate for different types of consumer. Within contemporary narratives of food and eating, there remains a marked tendency to assume meat will be consumed by men and prepared by women; it is a cultural good that reflects and constructs the intersected social relations of both species and gender. The relationship between meat, gender and sexuality also makes its presence felt across a range of food texts such as recipes and

menus in food magazines, which provide convincing, albeit far more subtle examples, than the kinds of advertisements that might be found in US food culture.

Despite the more subliminal qualities of the British case, meat consumption can fairly readily be associated with male virility, and can also be considered as a form of food pornography, or anthropornography. Images and texts of meat eating may be framed heteronormatively or directly heterosexualized and the fragmentation and presentation of animal bodies can be read as recalling the pornographic fetishization of human bodies, overwhelmingly of women's bodies. The cultural texts of meat are not always pornographic. The images which illustrate this paper however, are certainly not exceptional or extreme examples. Rather, such images are both commonly and consistently used in the food advertising and popular cookery writing in the UK over the last thirty years. This suggests that eating meat continues to be part of the cultural construction of heterosexuality. Persistent, complex and co-constituted forms of domination, such as those of gender and species are often "experienced as, 'desire', as 'appetite', as 'pleasure'...unmoored from the privilege that permits it" (Adams, 2003:171). The mainstream culture of gendered animal food and the pornography of meat are challenged, at the margins, by the increased visibility of minority food cultures such as vegetarianism. The last fifteen years have seen some degree of mainstreaming of vegetarian food culture but the tropes of the dominant culture remain little changed, and vegetarian food culture has articulated the narratives of heteronormativity and sexualization as part of the process of incorporation.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Adams presented ‘The Sexual Politics of Meat’ at the ‘Meet Animal Meat’ conference, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> May 2009. The ensuing debate, and particularly the interventions of Judith Halberstam, articulated this critique of Adams ‘outdated’ theorization of gender relations very strongly.

<sup>2</sup> The empirical material for this article is drawn most heavily from the two best selling food magazines in the UK, *Good Food*, published monthly by the BBC, and *Sainsbury's Magazine*, published for the UK based supermarket chain by New Crane Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> The sources drawn upon in this section are overwhelmingly vegetarian and not vegan. I did not find vegan food, recipes and cookery very much at all in the mainstream popular cultural sources and where I did, vegan food was generally presented as a ‘specialist’ diet within vegetarian publications. The framing discourses around the

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presentation of veganism (health, ethics) were generally positive. Whilst I did not find them sexualized, my examples were too limited to extrapolate from.